

Yom Ha'atzmaut: History and Meaning



Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day, is a celebration of the founding of the State of Israel. The establishment of Israel as a Jewish homeland was finalized by a United Nations resolution on the 5th day of the Hebrew month of Iyar, in 1948. This year marks Israel's 55th year as an independent state.

Israel is referred to as old-new land because while it is only 55 years old it's the birth place of the Jewish people where for centuries (autonomous and not) a thriving Jewish community existed.

Israel's proclamation for independence states: *The land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious, and national identity was formed.... Here they wrote...the Bible. Exiled...the Jewish people remained faithful to it(They) strove throughout the centuries to go back to the land....*

For about 2,000 years, at various corners of the world, that longing for Zion (another name for Israel) was expressed in liturgy, poetry and literature. During the Golden Age of Spain (12th century), Yehuda Halevi authored the famous words, *My heart is in the east (Israel), and I am at the end of the west (Spain)*. In the late 19th century, literary expression gave way to political organization. Leaders such as Hertzl, the visionary of the Jewish State; A. D. Gordon, a philosopher and a pioneer who spiritualized the working of the land; Eliezer Ben Yehuda, who revived the Hebrew language, dormant for centuries; and Achad Ha'am who inspired many with his writings, all gave the Zionist movement inspiration and guidance.

Arthur Waskow notes that the word Atzma'ut comes from the Hebrew word bone. The word *hints at the positive affirmation of an identity, at standing on one's own feet...In that light, Yom Ha'atzma'ut celebrates...the continued striving in the present and future to affirm one's own identity*. The process of creating the state was closely aligned with claiming more parts of our collective identity through language, culture, going back to the land (both meanings), and political empowerment.

All the Jewish holidays (with the exception of Purim) were created in Israel. All of them contain strong bonds with the land. With the return to the land, most of the holidays regained themes that were almost lost through centuries of exile. The pioneers of the turn of the century living the dream, going back to farming after being barred from this activity through much of exile, reconnected with the agricultural and seasonal elements of the holidays and restored their place in our tradition.

Herzl, the visionary of the Jewish state, who accurately prophesied its establishment decades before it took place, and devoted his life to political work, guiding the process along wrote: " Dream and deed are not as different as many think. All the deeds of men are dreams at first, and become dreams in the end." - Theodor Herzl, Postcripts, *Altneuland*

• Avital Plan, Jewish Education Specialist

ISRAEL REMEMBRANCE DAY

YOM HAZIKHARON Commemoration

Join us on
Israel's Day of Remembrance
as we remember those who have given
their lives in support of Israel

Monday, May 5, 2003

at 7:30pm

Berkeley Richmond JCC

1414 Walnut Street, Berkeley

ADMISSION IS FREE



Sponsored by Jewish Community
Federation of the Greater East Bay

Co-sponsors: Berkeley Richmond JCC,
Consulate General of Israel, JCRC - East Bay
and the following Israel Action Committees:
Beth El, Beth Emek, Beth Hillel, B'nai Tikvah, East Bay,
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For more information,
contact (510) 839-2900 x253, riva@jfed.org,
or go to our website www.jfed.org/israel55.htm

YOM HA'ATZMAUT

ISRAEL
INDEPENDENCE DAY



5 Iyar, 5763

May 7, 2003

Berkeley Richmond
Jewish Community Center
1414 Walnut Street
Berkeley, CA 94709
(510) 848-0237

An agency of the Jewish
Federation of the Greater East Bay

Customs and Symbols

Yom Ha'atzmout begins the evening following Yom Hazikaron with community celebrations. The collective mood then changes from sorrow to festivity.

The symbols of the holiday are:

The Israeli flag with the star of David, fashioned after the talit (the blue and white prayer shawl),

The menorah with olive branches, fashioned after the one that used to be in the Temple in Jerusalem more than 2000 years ago,

The dove of peace, inspired by the Biblical story of Noah.

Resources

Barry Chazan and Yehiel Poupko, *Guide to Jewish Knowledge*; Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way*; Yom Tov Levinski, *Sefer Hamo'adim*, vol. 6; Eliezer Schweid, *The Cycle of Appointed Times*; Michael Strassfeld, *The Jewish Holidays*; Nahum Wharman, *The Jewish Holidays and Festivals of the Jewish Year*; Arthur Waskow, *Seasons of Our Joy*.

HATIKVAH (The Hope)

Israel's National Anthem

Kol od balevav penimah
Nefesh yehudi homiyah,
Ulfatei mizrach kadimah
Ayin l'tziyon tzofiyah,
Od lo avdah tikvatenu,
Hatikvah shnot alpayim,
Lihyot am chofshi beartzenu,} 2X
Eretz Tziyon virushalayim.}

So long as still within our breasts
The Jewish heart beats true,
So long as still toward the East,
To Zion, looks the Jew,
So long our hopes are not yet lost—
Two thousand years we cherished them
To live in freedom in the Land
Of Zion and Jerusalem.

WILDPEACE Yehuda Amichai

Not the peace of a cease-fire,
not even the vision of the wolf and the lamb,
but rather
as in the heart when the excitement is over
and you can talk only about a great
weariness.

I know that I know how to kill,
that makes me an adult.

And my son plays with a toy gun that knows
how to open and close its eyes and say
Mama.

A peace
without the big noise of beating swords into
ploughshares,
without words, without
the thud of the heavy rubber stamp: let it be
light, floating, like lazy white foam.

A little rest for the wounds -
who speaks of healing?
(And the howl of the orphans is passed from
one generation
to the next, as in a relay race:
the baton never falls.)

Let it come
like wildflowers,
suddenly, because the field
must have it: wildpeace.

*Yehuda Amichai is one of Israel's better
known poets. The poem combines allusions
to old Jewish texts with poignant
contemporary Israeli experiences.*

Yom Hazikaron

Israel's Memorial Day

4 Iyar, 5763 - May 6, 2003

History and Meaning

Yom Hazikaron commemorates those who died in the course of duty with the Israel Defence Forces, as well as those who died with the underground combat units fighting for independence.

In Israel, it is one of the saddest days of the year. Many Israelis visit military cemeteries and local community ceremonies are conducted in every city, town, village and kibbutz. By law, all entertainment establishments including restaurants, cafes, theaters, etc. are closed for 24 hours. All flags are lowered to half mast. There is quiet, somber music on the radio.

At 11 am, a siren is sounded and everything stops. For two minutes all Israelis stand still. In the evening a national ceremony is held on Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem which is seen on television throughout Israel.

Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmout (Israeli Independence Day) have been linked together since 1948. Yom Hazikaron is always 24 hours beforehand, beginning with sundown and concluding the next evening with the beginning of Yom Ha'atzmout.

This combination of remembrance and joy is a Jewish tradition we find in many of our observances, as when we break a glass at wedding ceremonies to remember the destruction of the Temple. It has special meaning on this day, tying together the miracle of an independent Jewish state and the price that had to be paid for the state to emerge, exist and survive.

Information provided by the JCC Association of North America .

Yizkor for Yom Hazikaron

May God remember the sons and daughters who exposed themselves to mortal danger in those days of struggle prior to the establishment of the State of Israel and (may God remember) the soldiers of ZAHAL (the Israel Defence Forces) who fell in the wars of Israel.

May the people of Israel keep them in their memory -- and be blessed with their seed; let them mourn the splendor of youth, the charm of valor, the holiness of will, and the devotion of self-sacrifice which came to an end in the heavy battles.

May the loyal and valiant heroes of freedom and victory be sealed forever within the hearts of Israel.